

# THE DIARY OF A STAFF OFFICER

(AIR INTELLIGENCE LIAISON OFFICER)

AT

ADVANCED HEADQUARTERS  
NORTH B.A.F.F. 1940

*"God offers to every mind its choice between truth  
and repose. Take which you please. You can never  
have both."*

EMERSON



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THE THEORY  
OF A STATE OFFICER

(AIR FORCE AND NAVY OFFICERS)

ADVANCED COURSE  
JUNE 1940

THE AIR FORCE AND NAVY OFFICERS  
ADVANCED COURSE

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MEMORANDUM  
JUNE 1940

TO  
THE PRINCIPLE  
OF LOYAL  
AND UNPREJUDICED  
CO-OPERATION  
BETWEEN THE  
THREE SERVICES

## PERSONAL NOTE

THE AUTHOR was one of the two Army officers appointed as Air Intelligence Liaison Officers to serve under the G.H.Q. Military Adviser, Colonel J. Woodall, on the staff of Air Marshal Sir A. S. Barratt who was Commander-in-Chief of the British Air Forces in France in 1939-40. During the operations, the subject of this diary, the two A.I.L.Os. combined the duties of liaison and assistant military advisers.

## FOREWORD

THIS DIARY is reproduced exactly as written at the time of the events it records in France, with the exception of some omissions and a few minor alterations necessary in the interests of security.

The author has no pretension to any qualifications justifying serious military criticism and disowns any such intention in this document. Its sole interest rests in the simple sequence of entries that accumulate and combine finally to illustrate the immeasurable complications and infinite reactions of the short campaign in France as jotted down by an independent witness. The diary may, perhaps, help readers to grasp even more clearly than they do already from following events in the Press the accumulation of weight, both political and military, that piled up during the first phase of this universal warfare to handicap the commanders of the British Expeditionary Force and the British Air Forces in France.



## CHAUNY. AISNE

*May 10th, 1940.* Awoke to hear heavy A.A. fire about 0430 hours. I took no notice at first, as there has been intermittent fire of this sort round here for a few days. Later, about 0515 hours, the unusually heavy and constant gun-fire and the noise of aircraft overhead brought me to my window. It was a cloudless first light. Five enemy aircraft came into my line of vision in diamond formation, with the fifth machine rather too far astern. The sky was filled with brown and white puffs of shell bursts. A few moments later the rattle of machine guns in a sequence of short bursts announced the appearance of allied fighters. Other aircraft followed and the sound of firing died away as quickly as the machines were lost to sight.

Returned to bed and about 0700 hours Grierson woke me tapping at Oxborrow's door, which is next mine. According to Oxborrow's account, when he came in to my room shortly afterwards, the war had begun.

Our billet is a comfortable one. A little house we have rented independently. Oxborrow had the first call on the bath. He swallowed a hasty breakfast and motored up to H.Q. I got up more leisurely, had breakfast, collected papers and came up to the office an hour later. Here came the confirmation that the war at last was on. The Germans were already in ARNHEM. The French and ourselves on the move into Belgium. Many of our aerodromes had been bombed, but with little effect. Five German bombers had been brought down.

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Probably many more from among the unconfirmed list. Our own losses five aircraft on the ground and no casualties. It is bad to lose aircraft on the ground but for all that not a bad start. The Air Component H.Q. at MAROEUIL had their communications sabotaged and it was an hour or two before the damage was put right.

In the town here everything goes on as usual. The market is in full swing. The flower stall gayer than ever. The old lady from the creamery delivered the cream pot to the minute with never a word of the early morning events.

At 0930 hours came the news that parachute troops had been dropped at GREVENMACHES and REMRICH. A column ten miles long was on the LUXEMBURG-ETERNICH road. Smiles everywhere. The war had begun. Peace is on the way.

At 1000 hours went to the station in search of a case of Amontillado. Not there, alas! I also arranged for billeting Hogan and Spiers, who are Col. Woodall's driver and batman, and fixed up the extra rations against this increase in our strength. Returned to H.Q. at 1030 hours and heard that the battle was general. BRUSSELS, AMSTERDAM and ANTWERP had been bombed.

Langston, A.C.F.F. liaison officer, turned up just now. On the way here he had two German bombers over his head at 40 feet. One was brought down by A.A. fire shortly afterwards and the crew made prisoners.

The Belgians and Dutch are reported to be resisting and the French have crossed the Belgian frontier.

Air Marshal Barratt arrived at 1035 hours with his staff. He has walked in as I am writing his name, smiling and happy, sucking his pipe.

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There is no news yet from the reconnaissance sent out this morning by the A.C.F.F.

A message is just in stating that 40 enemy troop carrying planes have landed at THE HAGUE.

G.H.Q. seem to have been caught off their guard. It is the old story of crying wolf. Quite a lot of people away on leave. The contrast between the real thing and the opening phase of an exercise is very forcible. In theory the messages flew in thick and fast. Intelligence summary trumps intelligence summary. There is not a second to spare. And now the fact, the real thing in practice. There is no news of our own troops or aircraft. No messages, no intelligence summaries, no telephone.

1145 hours. Major Archdale has looked in. He is liaison officer with Gen. Billotte at the French 1st group of Armies H.Q. He says the French 7th, 1st, 9th and 2nd Armies are well away. The news that the Belgian Army is resisting is not yet confirmed according to Archdale. The French 2nd Army has done best so far. It is well into Luxemburg.

1200 hours. 70 Wing reports return of the first sortie from Strip "C." (Reconnaissance areas were designated strip "A," "B," "C," running West to East from the Belgian frontier to the Rhine.) Dutch columns have been seen moving East on all roads. Belgians moving East in bus columns. Bridges on the MEUSE said to be all blown. A big fire raging in BRUSSELS.

This is in some ways an encouraging report. We had feared that this sortie would never return. The perfect day offers no chance of escape in friendly clouds. Evading action is cut down to desynchronisation of

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engines, height and course alteration and general manœuvre. This sortie also reported no enemy troop movements West from the German frontier.

Went down to the billet for *déjeuner*, which was enlivened by an air raid warning and plenty of gun-fire.

The air raid siren is on the roof of the post office almost opposite the billet. The noise is very effectively terrorising. Personally I feel that the psychological effect of the air raid warnings is far more potent in effecting the demoralisation of the local inhabitants than is the actual bombing itself. There have been some heavy civilian casualties down the road this morning by the railway at TERGNIER. A sad affair. The target was legitimate enough for all that.

Back at the office. News not too bad. Most parachute troops dropped in Holland have been captured. A column in Luxemburg very successfully attacked by the A.C.F.F. Demolitions everywhere *said to be* 100 per cent. effective.

About 1530 hours an air raid warning and the sound of a large formation coming our way. 50 per cent. of effectives ordered into the trenches, tin hats, gas bags and all. Just before this incident I had the pleasure of reporting to the French (Z.O.A.N.) H.Q. that the 12th Lancers had crossed the Belgian frontier at 1300 hours about the centre of the B.E.F. sector, probably moving on several parallel routes.

Columns of black smoke in the direction of the railway. Poor TERGNIER is in trouble again.

NANCY is reported as having been bombed. Such a lovely town. I was there on my visit to the Maginot and the Saar in January. The barracks at LIÉGE have also been bombed and set alight.

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May 11th. Col. Woodall and Oxborrow took night duty and Langston and I left for the billet at 2200 hours. During the night there were several air raid warnings and a certain amount of A.A. fire. The noise of aircraft was far less persistent than during the night before. Getting up at 0600 hours, I felt really thoroughly refreshed.

Langston and I got to the office at 0700 hours. We found a conference under way. The news seemed pretty good. The Dutch seem to have regained control of their aerodromes and the allied armies, particularly in the North, going great guns. And yet are we perhaps inviting the Encounter battle we have been taught to avoid at all costs? The march into Belgium may prove a dangerous abandoning of our original plan which was to fight in existing prepared positions only.

Talk of moving our H.Q. And about time too. We have no cover at all here. A beautiful target. A barracks square at its centre, with our offices arranged along its sides. A slit trench a few yards from the buildings is not in any case roomy enough to hold one half of the staff.

*Déjeuner* and the usual air raid warning to accompany the sherry. It is a bad thing to be critical, but I cannot forget the appalling waste of life and courage that civilised understanding should have been equal to directing to constructive ends.

May 12th. 2100 hours. Have not recorded much today. In fact, nothing until now. Was on duty last night and have not a vast lot of spare energy.

A day of anxiety starting at 0400 hours with a series

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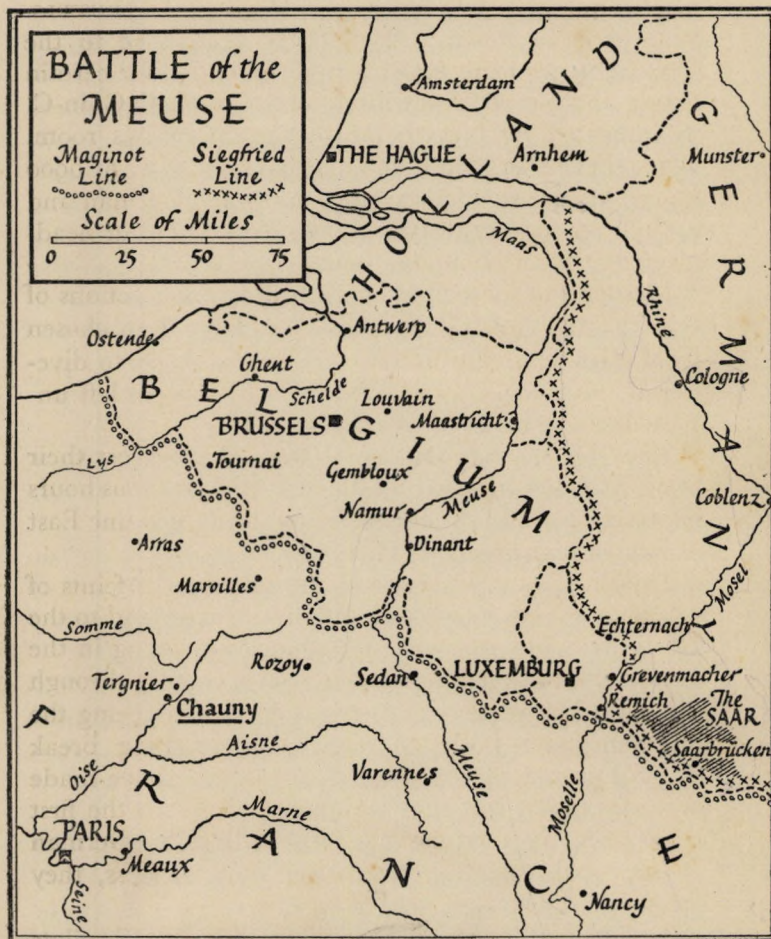
of disturbing messages from No. 3 Mission in BRUSSELS and from the Dutch and British Ministers in BRUSSELS. Was early in touch with G.H.Q. and spoke to the D.C.I.G.S. and the A.O.C.-in-C. Arranged for certain action and passed on the intentions of the A.O.C.-in-C. as indicated by him to me in the operations room. Was relieved at 0700 hours and back for duty at 0900 hours. Many air raid warnings and some German and many French aircraft passed over. A.A. over our headquarters, but no bombing near.

Messages of incredible heroism describing actions of pilots of the A.A.S.F. four of whom have been chosen from a whole squadron that volunteered *en bloc* to dive-bomb the bridges at MAASTRICHT which were left unblown as the result of treachery on J1.

They have succeeded, but I fear all have lost their lives. They have gained the allied armies precious hours in which to establish themselves on the agreed line East of BRUSSELS on the Dyle River.

Fighting seems general and the advance, or feints of advance, covers the whole front from Switzerland to the North Sea. The position in Holland is puzzling in the extreme. Conflicting reports chase one another through our files. The impression is that for the time being the Germans have failed to make the smashing break through they had hoped for. A break they have made at MAASTRICHT, but that was expected. From the first it has been expected that the full weight of the German attack would be delivered here. None the less, they have been fairly well held to-day.

An incident showing the spirit of our R.A.F. pilots is the appearance here of a pilot who was shot down this morning between TONGRES and TIRLEMONT. After



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being chased from his machine, he joined up with some Belgian infantry and while with these they mistook a force of German tanks for Belgian tanks and, going towards them, were fired on. The whole party ran for it to a wood and here discovered some dead civilians. The pilot stripped one of these, discarded his uniform, and walked away as a Belgian peasant slap through the Germans. In half an hour he had got a lift in a Belgian car and found his way to these H.Qs. Now he is on his way to his squadron in Air V.-Marshal Blount's car; the A.V.M. happened to be here when this pilot turned up. No more to-night. I must get some sleep.

*May 13th.* In Mr. Pepys' language, 7 hours abed. Many air raid sirens all night, but slept well between the blasts and the church bells. These, by the way, are a strange development. On a raid warning sounding the bells clang out a very terrifying alarm. The "all clear" is signalled by three minutes of wedding peals. So many warnings and rejoicing from the church towers with so little interval somehow makes me feel that the cause of all this noise may be due to something that is instinct in the silence in the aisles below—something that was not uttered from pulpits nor spoken from the hearts before their altars.

This morning things seem to be stabilising. The picture is developing. The only dark feature is a threat to the French 7th Army's left by a German mechanised column. This column is reported to be 12 miles long—closely spaced and is now passing through BREDÁ. The Bomber Command sees in this a

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useful target and is about to deal with it. I hope soon to hear that the help asked for by the French has been effective.

In the gap West of MAASTRICHT the French have counter-attacked and have retaken TIRLEMONT and VARENNES. They used their tanks here with considerable success.

The MAASTRICHT bridge attack supported by relays of bombers, first English and then French, at short intervals has been a real success. It is felt here that with 500 more aircraft at our disposal the German advance would have been utterly smashed as the result of our bombing of the immense and recklessly vulnerable targets offered to our aircraft in the form of close columns on the many routes of the enemy's advance.

A strange, and I feel, very suspicious feature, has been the extraordinary lack of any German bombing of the B.E.F. and the French armies in their advance through Belgium during the last four days. It looks almost as if the Germans want us where we are going. Has the French High Command forgotten that the Encounter battle is the risk we have always been told to avoid at any cost. Even at the cost of political misdemeanour. Admittedly the German front is an enormous one stretching from NARVIK to the Swiss frontiers. The dissipation of air strength over this immense line may perhaps be proving an unexpected source of weakness to the Germans.

We have hints of a naval coup and also of a big air venture by the Bomber Command; the bombing of the RUHR, I suspect. News should be coming over soon about the latter.

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*May 14th.* No good news came. On the contrary grave information in the afternoon of the fall of SEDAN and the crossing of the MEUSE at DINANT, 20 miles south of NAMUR. It is my turn for night duty. At midnight came the news of the worsening of the SEDAN situation. A salient 15 kilometres long and some 10 kilometres deep had been created. An immediate conference of the "high-ups." Air Marshal Barratt, General d'Astier, General de Groupes d'Armie Billotte, Commandant d'Arneaux (General Georges' liaison officer), Commandant Pessons-Didions, Liaison officer to General Vieullemin, officer commanding the French Air Force, were the more important of those present. The conference was a tragic affair. Most of the French officers were in tears, some quite openly sobbing at having to admit the shame they felt in acknowledging the appalling fact that the French had walked out of their fortified positions without any attempt at genuine resistance. This is a very bad affair.

About 0430 hours the A.O.C.-in-C. asked me for his special sortie pilot. We had a talk over the map and we discussed the position on the Meuse. It was imperative that certain information should be sought. I then briefed the pilot and this was a job that I very much disliked, because I knew the task was a fairly hopeless one. I instructed him in the reconnaissance of the MEUSE on either side of SEDAN, at the break, with the object of seeing if the pontoons thrown over by the Germans the previous day were still there or if the bombing task of the last night allotted to the Fairey Battles had been successful. Still no news from this sortie.

The 7th Army seems to be having a bad time on the left. The 9th Army is in the SEDAN sector. Enemy aircraft

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continuously overhead all morning, dodging here and there but in small numbers only.

Have just spoken to Commandant d'Arneaux (Z.O.A.N.). He tells me that the French have 30 fighters over the SEDAN area. An artillery bombardment is in full swing and the infantry counter-attack will be launched at 1100 hours. The infantry are to be led by Chars (tanks) and, according to d'Arneaux, the troops are full of spirit and hope to knock hell out of the Germans.

1415 hours. The French counter-attack at SEDAN was delayed 30 minutes. A fatal pause. The Germans have meanwhile delivered a further stroke and have widened the gap on either side by 3 miles each way and have penetrated forward 3 miles into open country. The French have lost the whole of their artillery.

Not so very long ago I went right through the fortifications on this front and estimated that a well-organised and determined resistance would cost the Germans half a million casualties if they were to break through. And what has happened? The Germans have walked through 5 miles of fortifications in depth with a loss of probably 500 men. It appears that as the SEDAN sector was considered so strong the most inferior of the French divisions were posted there to hold it. They were mostly Parisians and their morale of the very lowest order. When the dive-bombers came down on them they stood the noise—there were hardly any casualties—for only 2 hours, and then they bolted out with their hands over their ears like a lot of frightened old ladies. One cannot be surprised at the tears of the General Staff.

The most momentous decision has just been taken. The A.O.C.-in-C. has got the concurrence of the C.-in-C. (Gort) and Generals Gamelin and Georges, in asking the British Cabinet to authorise the employment of the Metropolitan Bomber Force in an attempt to stop the rot within the next 2 hours. The A.O.C.-in-C. has got the agreement of G.H.Q. to release 4 squadrons of fighters from the Air Component to provide cover for the bombers. Decisions have been asked for and taken with great promptitude by the British. Colonel Woodall, my G.I, the G.H.Q. representative here, is responsible, I believe, in the first place, for suggesting this attempt to retrieve what threatens to be an enemy advance that will turn the Maginot Line. The tempo of the new warfare is indeed fast. We wait in anxiety and I believe that the Air Marshal's action may save the situation yet.

General Swayne, head of No. 2 Mission, has just rung through. He has been in touch with G.Q.G. General Georges will be satisfied with 100 aircraft to be placed by the Bomber Command at the A.O.C.'s disposal. The Air Marshal is deprived of this opportunity for smashing action. The big effort, the action which would have borne psychological fruit, the momentous decision of the previous paragraph has now been wittled down by General Georges to a request for a force of a mere 100 machines. No longer a matter for a Cabinet decision, the attempt at a knock-out blow is not to be delivered. Caution, safety first, and too late, the usual sequence. All the dash and drive is left to the Germans. The Metropolitan Bomber Force stays at home and will only be called upon if the situation worsens again.

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2200 hours. 77 Fairey Battles went in at SEDAN in the first wave with fighter cover. They went in low and lost 37 machines. They were successful. They destroyed all 3 pontoons and the French counter-attacked with partial success, regaining the high ground round the salient. From these points General Georges means to launch another attack to-morrow the objective of which, we are rather optimistically told, will be the retaking of SEDAN. The French have put in a wave of 60 bombers and the Bomber Command is to follow on with a further large-scale attack.

At DINANT the French have counter-attacked with some success, but South of this town the Germans have a new foothold on the left bank.

*May 15th.* No more till to-morrow, except to add that 26 German bombers bombed the railway here this afternoon. When I went out to inspect the damage about an hour later, bombs began exploding, having been fitted with delayed-action fuses, so had to move off. The shooting had been fairly accurate, a good deal of damage done, a fire started in the railway station.

On duty again last night. Quiet. Bombing reports all satisfactory. All targets attained and all aircraft at home. We went to rest at 0500 hours. At breakfast Woodall told me that the position was damnable. I thought he said "admirable" and the correction was rather a blow. Since I went to bed it appears that news has come through that from DINANT to SEDAN the enemy have crossed the MEUSE. This is a 50-mile front. Their penetration so far is not much beyond the left bank. At SEDAN the 9th Army is containing the enemy

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and at DINANT a counter-attack has recovered much of the ground lost.

Many refugees passing through here this morning, mostly on bicycles, some in ancient rattle-trap cars, and here and there something Rue de la Paix. Heavy bombing this morning of the railway; one big egg whistled over my head while I was shaving, much too close for comfort. Everything very depressing, but perhaps not despairing. It seems queer to talk of despair at such an early stage, but here with the French armies we feel its presence very markedly. Talk of an unofficial character of a retirement of the French to the AISNE RIVER. How will they tie up with the B.E.F. on the left, I wonder. The question will soon be answered now.

1400 hours. News of the successful withdrawal of the 7th Army through the ANTWERP defences. Also news that 3 divisions of the 7th Army are being diverted to support the 9th Army on the MEUSE in the SEDAN sector. I am curious to know what route they will travel. Will it be by road or by rail via PARIS.

The railway junction at TERGNIER, just at hand, has been steadily bombed most of the morning. The line is blocked and troops have to march some miles beyond the break where a shuttle service has been organised. The air raid sirens are wailing again. They make a gloomy accompaniment to our *déjeuner*.

The news from the B.E.F. seems good. Also news just in that the G.O.C. 7th Army has come South to take over the 9th Army, whose commander has been granted "permission." It is already rumoured that he has been shot.

Woodall has just returned from a visit to General

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Billotte, who commands our group of armies. Woodall saw Archdale there, our liaison officer with General Billotte. Woodall's account not very encouraging.

The taking of the MAASTRICHT bridge is a fairy tale, amazing in its daring. A plain-clothes man walked over to the sentry on the bridge on the East bank and asked him, as a friend, to allow him across the bridge for a last word with a pal on the West bank. He was allowed to pass, he walked across the bridge and after a few minutes' conversation strolled back towards the sentry with his friend. This second man then, gangster-like, shot the sentry and bolted back to the far bank, where he disconnected the wiring of the mines prepared for the destruction of the bridge. While this was being done, the first man possessed himself of the sentry's rifle and easily prevented any interference. The timing was a work of genius; within a few minutes, parachutists and gliders descended in a cloud on the top of the Dutch fortifications and the Belgian fortifications West of the bridge which is just in Dutch territory. The Germans ran around pushing hand grenades into loopholes, throwing bombs into gun emplacements and casemates and generally playing hell with the place, literally before anyone realised that an attack was about to develop at all. They threw their bombs into open doors, into the turrets of the casemates and within an hour, with a loss of only 300 men, the MAASTRICHT bridge-head was established. It had never been supposed that such an achievement would cost less than 50,000 lives.

SEDAN fell as the result of air bombardments; there the French cut and ran after 2 hours of it. The MAASTRICHT bridge-head was assailed in silence. It was a

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superb example of the military precept known as surprise.

At last a bit of good news. News that the B.E.F. have re-established their line in a counter-attack at LOUVAIN. That's the stuff. They may put some heart into our Allies yet. I am afraid the French themselves will fail to counter-attack and that they have now abandoned the idea of restoring their position on the MEUSE. So far the French do not appear to have fought in a way that compares at all favourably with their great traditions.

2000 hours. Very bad news of the French. The Germans have developed their hold on the left bank of the MEUSE. They are now over from GEMBLAUX to a point below SEDAN and have gone as far West as ROZOY. This is not far East of LAON and about 20 miles from CHAUNY, which is our headquarters.

News has also been confirmed of parachute troops and also fairly substantial mechanised columns of Germans in the RHEIMS region. The German tanks may easily be here in the morning. Tremendous bombing of the railway is going on at the moment. The French 75's are putting up a terrific strafe about 10 miles East of here. The horizon is a sheet of flame and the noise of this resistance very comforting.

2200 hours. General d'Astier has packed up his headquarters and gone. Things are getting too hot. After a long discussion, it has been decided that we are to move, too. We are to follow the A.O.C.-in-C. to B.A.F.F. at 0300 hours. We are warned to be ready in 3 hours.

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A pretty hectic 3 hours it has been, too, but everything has been cleared out successfully. Steel filing cabinets, map cases, wall charts, typex machines, chairs and tables all loaded up in the headquarters M.T. All personal luggage, the men's kits and so forth were loaded up by 0130 hours. I believe I left nothing, not even half a bottle of my favourite sherry.

*May 16th.* Woodall, Oxborrow, myself and our driver, Hogan, set off at 2200 hours on our drive to B.A.F.F., which headquarters is at COULOMMIERS. We had a couple of rifles and our revolvers, which would not have been much good if we had run into tanks. The evacuation of Advanced Headquarters (North) B.A.F.F. is now complete.

The whole development of the southern front in these 7 days has been so fast and has been conducted on such unorthodox principles—principles of neck or nothing to the *n*th degree—that it is hard to believe the situation is so precarious as it is in fact.

It is clear this morning that the French, if their army fights and is not totally demoralised, have a great opportunity for a major success. The Germans have driven a wide salient into the French line. The Germans must be tiring; their fuel and ammunition supplies cannot be certain. They cannot have big reserves of fuel within easy striking distance. Then, if the French pinch off this salient, attacking along the Eastern flank of the penetration, they may with hardihood achieve a reversal of the third Napoleon's SEDAN.

Woodall has gone off to G.Q.G. a few miles from here to try and get a true picture from General Georges.

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There is a gloomy finality about to-day. If the French only attempt a strategic withdrawal on the whole line—that is, from ANTWERP to the MAGINOT LINE—the enemy tactics so successful last week will be repeated and the Germans will be in PARIS, as they boasted, by June 15th. The French must stand and fight if they are to win.

At home rapid decisions are not being made. The immediacy, the paramount immediacy, for releasing, say, 200 fighters to keep down the German bombers is not appreciated. The Air Ministry is to consider further the request made the day before yesterday and repeated yesterday with the utmost urgency. The defence of London, as in the last war, will always stand before the defence of France. This lack of fighter support is perhaps the only possible grouse the French have against us.

We were talking to a French officer to-day and he described the troops at SEDAN and how the German bombing had destroyed what they called “their physical make-up.” They could stand no more, they were finished, mentally vanquished, and finally we heard a word constantly repeated. The armies, he said, were *épuisé*. And all this due to the dive-bombers—dive-bombers that could have been tackled by our fighters. 500 fighters would have saved SEDAN.

Oxborrow and I were thinking this morning how strange it was that we two English soldiers could be 250 miles from the B.E.F. and be among the very few English to have any idea of the implications of these extreme moments in the world's history. I feel certain that the Cabinet can have no idea of what was happening yesterday or their action would have been

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different. From the newspapers it is evident that the people at home have so far had their complacency very little disturbed. We all remember the Battle of the Marne or at all events remember about it and we all have a foolish feeling that history will repeat itself.

It was rumoured last night that British bombers from the Bomber Command were to attack ESSEN in force. While the German Army is pouring into France, pouring through France, the bombers direct their effort on ESSEN. The bombing of ESSEN will not stop the German onrush in France. The maximum effort of the Bomber Command should be directed to concentrating on the major crossings of the MEUSE and breaking up the recklessly unorthodox formations, the close-packed columns pouring down every main road leading from East to West. I know this is not its recognised function, but the emergency seems to warrant this sudden change of plan.

To-day is the day above all when one hopes and prays for unity of command. There are too many masters, and while 12 men cannot make a decision it is easy enough for a dictator to give his orders.

1200 hours. On the run again, two *Panzer* (heavy armoured divisions) chasing West through VERVINS and BEAUMONT. (Has CHARLEROI fallen?) RHEIMS is being evacuated and we are told we may move North-west in order to slip in behind the B.E.F. at AMIENS.

2000 hours. The French report they are organising a new large-scale counter-attack on the immense pocket formed in the MEUSE bulge. The B.E.F. is to go back there to-night and back again to-morrow to the line of

the ESCAUT. May our fighters keep them free of the German bombers.

After going to No. 1 Mess to collect kit, I went down into COULOMMIERS to get some dinner there and to see how the town was taking things. What I saw made me really wonder if history was going to repeat itself after all. As just before the Battle of Marne in 1914, I saw the stream of the great Paris motor buses, taxis, lorries, charabancs, every form of motor vehicle, pouring through the town on their way to pick up troops and carry them to the front. The townspeople stood staring from the pavements; they still seemed cheerful; there was a good deal of shouting and cheering and an exchange of the universal signal of thumbs up. For an hour or two one thought that the spirit of France was reviving. Yes, I really believe it is. The next few days will decide if I am right.

*May 17th.* Things are not going well. The 7th Army and the B.E.F. are withdrawing to a line behind ANTWERP and BRUSSELS along the RIVER SENNE to CHARLEROI.

There has been no counter-attack. There is a grave thrust south of BRUSSELS to the B.E.F.'s right flank. Aircraft have been detailed to attack the enemy columns in the area, BRUSSELS—HAL—BRIANT—LE COMPTE—WATERLOO—LA HAUPE, so soon as withdrawal behind the RIVER SENNE is completed.

The 9th Army is still in trouble and the 1st Army and the 2nd Army may yet deliver flank attacks on the enemy salient West of the Meuse. News that Italy has attacked Yugoslavia has been broadcast this morning. This may not be true.

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*May 17th.* 1200 hours. The fog of war grows thicker, but none the less there emerges the gloomy bulk of the fact that many units of the French armies are not really fighting. The German armoured divisions are too much for them. It is Poland over again. It looks as if we may have to move on to-night with the French forces further West or possibly further South. Talk of the B.E.F. withdrawing to England. This seems deplorable. The whole collapse began through the miserable morale of the fortress troops. The French, we have learned to expect, rise to an emergency, but it looks as if this time it was too late to rely upon this national characteristic to perform the Phoenix trick.

1700 hours. The A.O.C.-in-C.'s special sortie pilots have been out to the area LAON—LA FERE—RIVER OISE—to LE CATEAU—AVENNES—VERVINS—CRECY—LAON, and also the line East and West of RETHEL. The whole of the area was virtually deserted. A few scattered French troops along the AISNE and North of the River. Germans holding bridges at LAON, LA FERE and RIBEMONT. The inference is obvious in the face of no preparation for counter-attack by the French. Where, everyone asks, in this area is the reputed French Army? G.Q.G. informs us that this area is strongly held, a curious piece of information.

The Belgians are doing well in the North. The B.E.F. is fighting with its usual doggedness. The French armies on either side the gap West of SEDAN are not too hardly pressed. Will the French be able to energise their forces and strike the blow necessary to relieve and reverse the situation?

Now comes a report that MONCORNET has been

retaken by the French. This village is said to have been lost and retaken 3 times. It is about 20 miles North-east of LAON. Here at least is what seems to be an isolated case of the old French spirit.

*May 18th.* News of the sort we had expected from the first came in to-day in a series of messages from various sources. The French have turned on the Germans. Many counter-attacks have been delivered. General Giraud, for example, states in a message just received: "Am attacked by 50 light and 50 heavy German tanks. Am destroying them progressively." Now, this is the language of the old days. It is characteristic of the type of officer we expected to find general and on which type we had relied to hold up the German advance. So far General Giraud's message is the first of its category.

It appears that in the neck-or-nothing thrust of the Germans they have used 100 per cent. of their motorised and armoured divisions. Ten armoured divisions have been employed in all, five of them in the SEDAN pocket, the rest in Flanders. The same thing applies to their use of dive bombers. They have employed their full strength and wisely. The Germans have established beyond doubt that the maximum effort at the well-chosen moment represents real economy and is in the end the best example of the principle of economic use of force.

The morale of the various French headquarters is recovering this morning. The Germans go in for false rumours through the Fifth Column. Reported gas attacks and warnings given with no cause, sabotage of transport, delayed-action fuses, use of parachute

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bombs which when released explode like Chinese crackers, very accurately reproducing machine gun-fire which from behind the lines is very disturbing to those in front and breaks down the morale, and so on.

0850 hours. We are told we are to move to-night to VERSAILLES. Bombers have just attacked G.H.Q. at LA FERRE. General Georges and his staff only just cleared out in time, or so it is rumoured. French fighters appeared very soon and the German bombers cleared off, passing over here, about 8 miles South, at COULOMMIERS.

Excellent breakfast at No. 1 billet. An amazing contrast. This chateau was General French's headquarters in the last war and its gardens and great lime avenues and its general atmosphere of peace and spaciousness make it impossible to believe in the events taking place not 20 miles away.

Read Gamelin's stirring orders to the armies and the people of France urging them to stand fast against the Germans. Is this a repetition or just an imitation of history? I feel it is only an imitation. The real thing is eluding us. They would have us believe that the Battle of the Marne will be fought again, but do they believe it themselves? I am afraid there is not the same probability of being able to establish a fixed defensive line to-day. The pace is too fast and the battle of movement has come into its own again.

If the French can destroy the German armoured divisions, the whole ten of them, then the striking force of the enemy will be broken. The French 70-ton tanks, of which we heard so much, do not appear to exist in any numbers. I believe that not more than 20 have been

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built. Before the German attack developed, I was frequently told that the French were longing for an opportunity to use their 70-tonners in the destruction of the German armoured divisions. The French officers spoke as if they had at least 1,000 of these giants waiting to deal with the Germans, and this type of conversation certainly created a false impression of strength in many minds. As it is, the French tanks are outmatched. They have been fought magnificently. The mechanised cavalry have certainly shown great dash and daring, but the heavier armoured German tanks have been too much for them and they have been shot to pieces. It is the co-operation between the dive-bombers and the armoured divisions that is winning this war for Germany.

1130 hours. Rumours that Germans are in CAMBRAI. I hardly believe this. I hear telephone communication with BRASSARD (G.H.Q.) has broken down since 2400 hours.

*May 17-18th.* We have to communicate with the B.E.F. through the Air Ministry in London.

2200 hours. *May 17-18.* The *Panzer* divisions seem insatiable. They should be short of fuel, their tracks should be giving trouble, and by the law of average a good proportion of them should be suffering from mechanical defects by this time. Their crews ought, by the ordinary laws governing physical endurance, to be completely exhausted. None of these influences seems to have developed. The *Panzer* divisions, with the bit between their teeth, are going as strong as ever. They

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have reached PERONNE and CAMBRAI. This afternoon one column of 60 tanks was successfully bombed by the Air Component. To-morrow the French and ourselves (we are briefing the Reconnaissance Sorties at this moment) are to locate the *Panzer* columns and make an effort to bomb them out of existence. The French D.L.Ms. (*Division Légère Motorise*) cannot take on the heavy German tanks. The 70-tonners do not exist and our only hope is attack from the air—at least, so says the French High Command. Personally, I am amazed that more heroic measures have not been taken. A few 75's shoved into every road in the path of the *Panzers* and to the flanks firing point blank would blow them to Kingdom Come.

And yet nobody stands behind the guns, though to take this action in a defence of one's capital does not seem to be making an excessive demand.

It is hoped that counter-attacks led by tanks on either side of the SEDAN pocket may yet be able to pinch off the invading mechanised units. Unless this is done the game is up. The B.E.F. will be cut off, its lines of communication cut and it will be another case of showing our skill at an evacuation. It is said that there are 6 *Panzer* divisions in the pocket now.

May 19th. Up most of the night.

0400 hours. Sent for by the Air Marshal to arrange second special sortie. He is indefatigable and never seems to leave the operation room. This sortie is now back safe. The German *Gros* is beginning to show up East of LAON at DIZY-LE-GROS. One infantry division

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located there. The *Panzers* still drive about at their own sweet will West of CAMBRAI and PERONNE. G.H.Q. has quit ARRAS and is said to be on its way to BOULOGNE. And all this accomplished by tanks with no main body behind them. No infantry within 60 miles, just motor cyclists and tanks. An illustration of the speed at which the thing has gone is the story of the military policeman in ARRAS who, seeing tanks coming down the road, held up the traffic for them and beckoned them on. They were the German tanks, but it was only when they opened fire that the military policeman recognised them and, oddly enough, he lived to tell the tale.

The B.E.F. and Belgians are fighting a successful rear-guard action. The French seem helpless under the menace of the German tanks. We are still trying to organise aerial attack on the tanks, and the French promise an attempt with their *cuirassiers* to wipe out the menace. My faith in such undertakings is beginning to fade.

1500 hours. News that the *Panzers* are in AMIENS. This is like some ridiculous nightmare. The B.E.F. is cut off. Our communications have gone. Presumably we go back with the French and the A.A.S.F. The B.E.F. must evacuate, leaving the country as best they can. I have told myself again and again that the German threat could not be sustained. Against all the rules of warfare, it has been sustained. The Germans have taken every risk—criminally foolish risks—and they have got away with it. They have laid themselves open to destruction from the air in close columns, they have laid themselves open to attack from exposed flanks, they have made themselves vulnerable by allowing their

mechanised units to outstrip by far too great a distance their main body, they have done everything that should not be done by orthodox book trained stereotyped soldiers, and they have made no mistake. The French General Staff have been paralysed by this unorthodox war of movement. The fluid conditions prevailing are not dealt with in the textbooks and the 1914 brains of the French generals responsible for formulating the plans of the allied armies are incapable of functioning in this new and astonishing lay-out.

It looks like the end already. Can this really be true? The thing is farcical; it is an anti-climax without equal. I find it impossible to believe, but we cannot get away from the facts.

As instructed in orders, I have just destroyed all my private and official papers. Everything is burned. It is one of those acts we read of in tragedies—something that we never expect to undertake ourselves. It is more than the papers we have burned, for with them we have burned nearly everything that remains of hope.

But there is still hope left, I suppose. The French "Higher Plane" appear to believe that there is still a chance of a successful resistance. They still chant the old refrain about the Battle of the MARNE. And we ourselves still repeat the comforting line that the German thrust must run itself out. I fear this is not so; the Germans outclass the French in equipment to a very great degree. They are filled with the spirit of success. The psychology of the Allies is not proof against the circumstances.

There has been an Allied conference to-day. General Dill flew over from London. It must have been a sticky ride. He is reported to have said that the B.E.F. will

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fight to the last man and the last round. This ought to satisfy the French.

*May 20th.* No communication with G.H.Q. Can still telephone England and have wireless communication with B.E.F. The B.E.F. is organising withdrawal and rear-guard duties. The D.M.I., General Mason-McFarlane, is commanding the right flank rear-guard. The B.E.F. is reported to be divided into four forces. The intention is not very clear, but the inference is evacuation through DUNKIRK, which we believe to be the only port available.

Gamelin has given place to Weygand. The latter takes the view that the issue will be settled one way or another within 24 hours. The striking power of our bombers at home is being employed deep in Germany in place of concentrating closer in on the river crossings of the MEUSE and the OISE and so creating disorganisation, particularly at night, in the area immediately behind the German advance positions. The Germans are being allowed to rest at night as peacefully as they would at home. There is no harassing fire. Artillery has been used very little by either side, since the pace of the advance has outstripped the German guns and the allied artillery is hardly in position before it is either deserted or hauled away in the course of the retreat. Aircraft represent the only form through which the harassing fire of old days can be reproduced to-day, making the nights too horrid for rest. This is a soldier's point of view and this is a soldier's battle, but our airmen do not perhaps see this phase through soldiers' eyes. To us they seem to be wasting their efforts and

likely to lose the bases through which they operate as the result of this inability to spare aircraft for close-in co-operation with the Army in this its very desperate hour of need.

The whole battlefield is curiously involved and the positions of Allied and enemy troops is so uncertain that there are unavoidable cases of our aircraft bombing the Allied concentrations in error. It is hoped that a concentration of Bomber Command aircraft will attack the two rivers, MEUSE and OISE, to-night and so delay the arrival of German reinforcements.

1600 hours. Sir John Dill, whose name arouses confidence in all, and General Otto Lund are here in conference with the A.O.C.-in-C. Have just left them in the operation room. The whole essence of a possible success lies in holding up the German reinforcements and gaining the time necessary to organise a powerful flanking counter-attack destined to cut the AMIENS-SEDAN pocket in half. There now comes in an Air Ministry message saying they will attack the marshall-ing yards. This means targets such as HAMM, East of ESSEN. We need help closer at hand if the armies are to be saved.

The German efficiency is well illustrated by the following wireless intercept. This message was sent in clear by the Germans. It says: "All bombers to CAMBRAI." Again, at 1400 hours to-day, "All fighters to ARRAS." And at 1410 hours we intercepted the reply. It read, "All fighters on the way."

This record is a reflection on allied procedure. How do we send out our messages? How do we send out our executive orders by wireless. As far as I know it has

never been in clear. The Allies send out orders calling for immediate action, but they send them in code, and this means that by the time the message is coded by the sender and decoded by the recipient some hours will have elapsed and the fleeting opportunity target will no longer present itself for attack. It will be too late. Not only this, but when hot news comes in with hot requests for immediate action the first step usually taken is to send out a single machine to confirm the necessity. Sometimes the aircraft so sent out fails to return and no action is taken, but in any case, by the time it can return and confirm the necessity for action, it will in all probability again be too late. The secret of successful warfare is very simple. It is based on rapidity of decision and the lightning execution of orders. The side that squanders time as the French have squandered it are inviting destruction and the invitation is being accepted. The Germans teach that it is better to take wrong action than no action at all. Sitting on the fence helps no one. Air Marshal Trenchard during the last war never changed his mind. He made quick decisions, and it used to be said that 50 per cent. of them were wrong, but the Air Marshal none the less achieved striking success. He took action and every other time he was right. To-day no imaginative offensive action is taken and all the time Gamelin is wrong. The Air Marshal is handicapped by the French Staff and statesmen.

When a sortie is sent out, a pilot has to be taken to the aerodrome, probably half an hour's run, and when his sortie is completed there is half an hour's run back before he is interviewed by an Intelligence Officer. The Intelligence Officer then passes the result of his

interrogation to the appropriate authority, who in turn discusses the wisdom of detailing aircraft for attack. A minimum of 3 hours elapses between the moment of spotting a target and the possible arrival of an Allied formation to engage it.

*May 21st.* AMIENS is now full of enemy troops. The Germans have also crossed the SOMME at ABBEVILLE. The Allies are now separated; the Germans stand between them from Belgium to the Channel at BOULOGNE. CALAIS is reported to be burning. No news yet of any counter-attack destined to close the pocket. One of the A.O.C.-in-C.'s special sortie pilots is just back. He left at 0500 hours to report on the area in which the French were to counter-attack this morning at first light. The area is ARRAS—CAMBRAI—CAMBRAI ROAD—thence towards BAPAUME. The significance of this area is that it seems to indicate that France, like Poland, will be conquered in 3 weeks.

1500 hours. No definite news. The B.E.F. and Belgians are reported to have counter-attacked with success, but only locally, not on a scale large enough to influence the issue decisively.

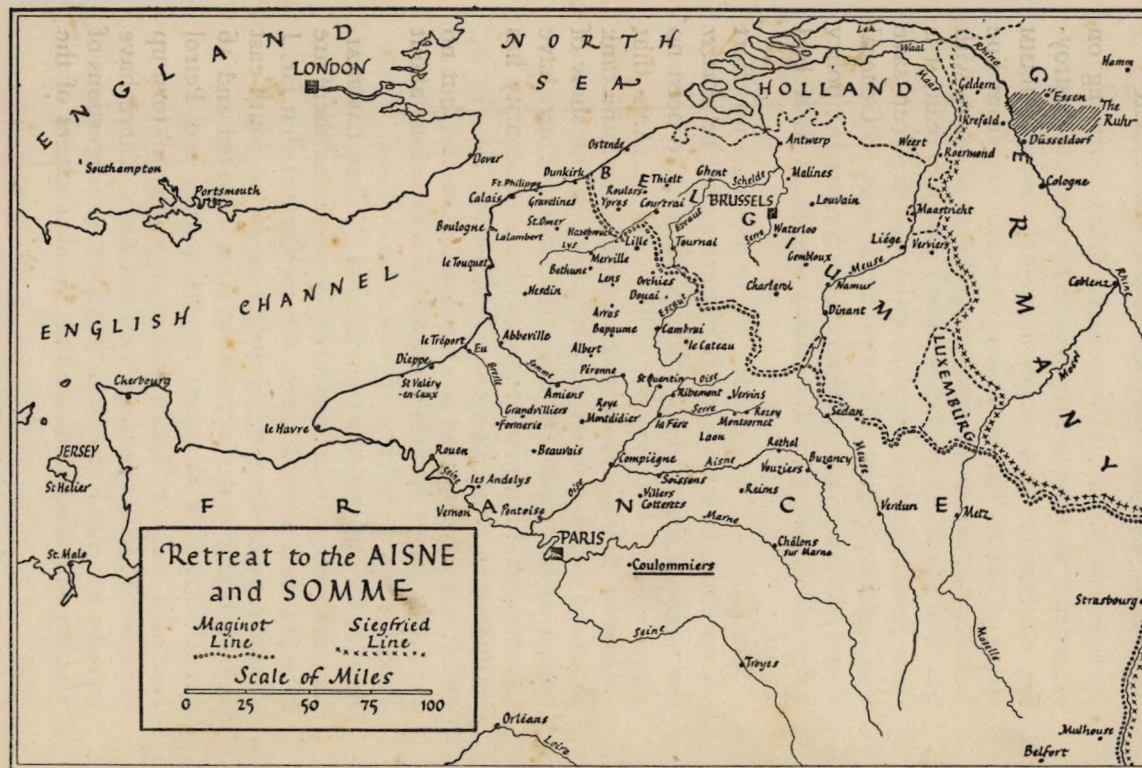
There is some conflict of opinions concerning the selection of targets for the Air Force between our various air commands, the B.E.F., the French air commanders and French Army commanders. General Dill favours, at this juncture, the concentration of all air effort near in to harass the enemy in the bulge and prevent supplies from moving forward. No bombing further East than the MEUSE to be entertained.

The R.A.F. naturally incline towards carrying on with their well-conceived long-term policy of destroying oil reserves and marshalling yards such as HAMM and the RUHR. This is magnificent with the front line established, but from the ground point of view, with the fate of the Allied forces hanging on a thread, it is only *immediate*, close-in results that we feel can save the situation. General Georges vacillates and General Tettu has actually directed the long-term policy targets for to-night. Too many cooks. It is a bad affair.

France lacks imagination. There has been no effort to mine and bomb with hand-grenades the *Panzer* columns on their line of march. There have been no improvised bottle bombs wrapped in blankets that burst into flame and wrap themselves round the tank tracks. There has been no enterprise and no show of initiative by junior officers and men. They have become Maginot-minded; a false sense of security has robbed them of initiative.

A good many German aircraft over to-day, but no bombing. Two were shot down just behind us, about midday.

The French are reported to have retaken CAMBRAI. DIEPPE is being indiscriminately bombed and there are rumours that the Germans have penetrated that far. I doubt it. MERVILLE Aerodrome, 12 miles South-east from HAZEBROUCK, has been reported deserted and 16 Hurricanes, half of them airworthy, left there. Petrol and oil stores, etc., intact. No doubt pilots will turn up in due course to collect these machines. There have been many queer desertions or temporary desertions of this sort. These stories remind me of instances of the



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inexplicable desertion of vessels at sea which are recorded from time to time: vessels apparently deserted for no reason. Such cases represent the most exciting of sea mysteries. This mystery of desertion can be solved in nearly all cases here by looking for the tracks of the *Panzers*. The account I give above is confirmed; an aircraft landed at MERVILLE and the pilot vouches for the facts. The aerodrome may have been shot up by some roving German mechanised column. MERVILLE is fully 30 miles behind the lines we hold.

*May 22nd.* Still no French counter-attack to pierce the bulge. Precious opportunities have been thrown away.

General Georges was asked point blank why the promised counter-attack had not been delivered. His liaison officer spoke for him and answered that the General could not give orders so far in advance of the inclinations of the divisions. This was an eye-opener and it is only now that it is brought home to me that the formation of soldiers' committees regularised in the French Army in 1936 by Monsieur Leon Blum's régime have so far undermined discipline. G.Q.G. is definitely handicapped by the spirit of internationalism that exists to such a great extent among the rank and file. Another point that was brought home to-day by a French officer is the fact that at least one-third of the French Army is recruited in the densely populated North. It is this northern area that is now in German occupation, with the result that one man in three has already lost his home and his place of employment. The argument seems to be that, human nature being

what it is, there is no longer any inducement to these men to resist, since all they have is already lost.

Our own one and only armoured division was landed in France yesterday and is to set off from ROUEN to try to deal with the German tanks. They will be very unfairly matched, alas!

Paul Reynaud uttered a fearlessly truthful statement of the facts last night on the T.S.F. and it also appears to-day in the French Press.

Our news from General Swayne from No. 2 Mission at LA FERTE is far from reassuring.

Took the precaution of buying maps of central France. I only got these with the greatest difficulty. I had to visit 5 shops to make up a set, as the refugees had cleared practically every map in the town. The refugee traffic is very heavy. The thing that touches me most in watching this unhappy caravan is the spirit of the small children who still wave and give the signal "thumbs up." Their ignorance only serves to impress the actual facts more vividly.

Eagle's (B.A.F.F. headquarters) main body is off to ORLEANS and I expect that we, North Eagle (Advanced H.Q., North B.A.F.F.) will move South or West shortly. Low cloud base, 200 feet, prevented early reconnaissance, but we have one sortie out now trying to locate the German juggernauts.

General Georges said this morning that the fate of France depended now on the success of the British armoured division. The division is now believed to be in action, but no news has yet come through.

It is strange, indeed uncanny, the emptiness that follows in the wake of the *Panzer* divisions. Sorties report "No movement seen" again and again in the track of

the tanks. Silent towns, empty roads, naked countryside. This morning's reconnaissance of the Aisne and roads running North from this river remain totally negative. Where are the Germans? Is this vast sweep to prove no more than a *tour de force*? Where are the German infantry? Where are the main bodies of the armies? Are we right in estimating them to be 100 miles behind this thunderbolt of 5,000 tanks?

Minor successes reported from the North by both the French and B.E.F.

Our weakness is multiplicity of command. Too many authorities. Too much secrecy in matters where secrecy must give place to immediacy. By the time a message is decoded it is too late to act and secrecy is a cruel farce. During the last few days there have been great target opportunities lost. 20 miles of tanks, 3 abreast, in close column, for instance. They were not attacked because the French could not decide if the target were in the French or the B.E.F. zone. Red tape and convention. Office convention. The French love these conventions and I fear we do ourselves. Forms and formula. These are the enemies in the field, even greater enemies to our cause than the German tanks.

The columns of refugees to-day are composed mostly of peasants. Their fine horses and the great wagons they draw in teams of four are something of an anachronism in these machine days. The wagons are piled high with household belongings, and perched among them are grandmothers and mothers and grandchildren and babies. The small children cling like little limpets on to the wagon loads. The spots of colour, the branches trailing from the baggage and the roofs of cars as camouflage and the stern old men and young boys who

guide the teams produce an effect that really brings tears to the eyes. No one could see this sight and not be disturbed by a sense of pity.

*May 23rd.* A quiet night at headquarters. This is mainly due to the complete breakdown in communications. This morning we have the news that the Germans have reached BETHUNE, which is North of ARRAS. Very sticky if true. The Bomber Command have been dropping bombs here and there on targets 100 miles and more behind the battle area. The soldiers still feel that the whole air effort should be in the forward area. Not a bomb should be dropped more than 50 miles back. The Air Ministry have taken over the control of the battle for the ports. Bombing of tanks on the ABBEVILLE-HESPIN ROAD has been effective and other road transport attacks in the same area have had good results.

2,000 lorries belonging to the A.A.S.F. are at TROYES, or in the TROYES area. At Woodall's advice, the Air Marshal has wirelessly to London for 3 experienced R.A.S.C. officers, who are being flown out here to-day to help in organising the move of the R.A.F. transport South-west.

The Allied leaders, including the French General Staff, and the French Cabinet, all profess a confidence I cannot feel myself when acquainted with so many regrettable facts concerning the situation. I can only hope and pray that these "high plane" men may be right, but I believe them to be over sanguine largely because the information guiding their decisions is so often stale. Such rapidity of action as we are witnessing has the same effect on the value of news as thunder has

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on the value of milk. I believe that much essential information fails to reach the right hands in time. Many reports are necessarily late and in these days the fate of nations hangs on minutes.

It is said that a scratch pack force of dive-bombers is to be collected forthwith to deal a counter-blow to the German dive-bombers that have proved so irresistible in conjunction with tanks in this campaign.

General Georges has just explained that three French D.L.Ms. are moving North from the line of the SEINE at PARIS to the sea, with the intention of taking up positions on the South bank of the Somme to *bouché* the South side of the bottle-neck. The Belgians are detaching one or two divisions to move in on the pocket from the North and North-east. In this way it is hoped to pen in the *Panzer* divisions. The whole of the Allied bombers are to go in during the day and try to smash the *Panzers*. Our own armoured division is moving on to the SOMME and will go into the pocket after the aerial bombardments and "clear up the mess." This is the plan, but the duty allocated to our armoured division appears to me a hopeless task.

General Georges says the position is critical for France, but he adds it is also critical for Germany. There is hope of converting the situation from a defeat into a major victory for the Allies. Again brave words. We here at these headquarters are *d'accord*.

1600 hours. 1230 hours C.G.S. got a message through asking for the cancellation of the Allied bombing attack on the pocket. British aircraft stopped just in time. It is doubtful if all French aircraft were kept on the ground. At approximately 1313 hours a message

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came through from C.G.S. instructing us to lay on the Allied bombing as originally planned. The whole area between the Somme and ST. OMER—that is to say, the area BOULOGNE—ST. OMER—BETHUNE—ARRAS—CAMBRAI—ST. QUENTIN—AMIENS—ABBEVILLE—is to be a no-man's-land. It is crowded with enemy tank formations, B.E.F. ambulances, French D.L.Ms. and columns of all arms marching and counter-marching. It is a *mêlée* of the first magnitude.

We hear that the Germans are about to deliver an attack from FLUSHING and the Bomber Command is asked to paste that port.

For the first time to-day we are being visited by enemy aircraft. There are 14 ME 110's over here at the moment.

1645 hours. News of British troop-carriers landing at LA LAMBERT, which is the BOULOGNE airport. This news comes through the intercept of a German message saying, "Fighters to LA LAMBERT. Attack British troop-carriers." We also hear that the French have turned round a considerable force in the North to face West and occupy a line from FORT PHILLIPE—GRAVELINES—ST. OMER, all East of CALAIS, in order to hold up the *Panzers*.

We deduce that 25-30 Allied divisions are now in the northern sector; it seems probable that they will strike South in the attempt to cut through the pocket down the line of the CANAL DU NORD, making contact with the main French army through PERONNE at HAM.

May 24th. 0990 hours. Position continues progressively more uncertain and more acute.

Have just had a French intercept of a German message in here. It reads, "At what time will bombing take place on DEAL, SOUTH FORELAND and DOVER—STEIN." This message may be a blind, but we have passed it on to the War Office.

1600 hours. Colonel Woodall has attended a G.Q.G. conference this morning. The French 1st Army, which exchanged positions with the 7th Army during the retreat, is to base its northern flank on the sea at DUNKIRK. The Allied front, facing West, will then run South-south-east to DOUAI through ST. OMER and BETHUNE. Thence on through DOUAI to ST. AMAND, after which it follows the Belgian frontier North along the RIVER LYS to ZEEBRUGGE.

The French have massed seven divisions between AMIENS and PERONNE. These divisions are to counter-attack North, and the armies of the North are to strike South. If they meet successfully, the situation will be saved. BOULOGNE and CALAIS are at present in German occupation.

Enemy troops are concentrating North of RHEIMS. We have just sent out a sortie to report on the progress of an engagement on the AISNE North of RHEIMS and find out if the enemy are across the river. A strong attack is to be delivered this morning further East in the BUCANCY area. The French counter-attacks checked the Germans at OCHES, 12 miles North-east from VOUIERS.

1845 hours. Our SOISSONS—BETHEL—RHEIMS sortie back safely. This aircraft flew over the area at 1,000 feet. We had provided fighter cover. The pilot reports,

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"No movement seen anywhere." Amazing. The aircraft was hit by a pom-pom through one aileron, probably fired by the French South of LAON.

Have been wondering why we have not used fast motor boats to run across the channel and dynamite or gun-cotton the tanks on the coast road between ABBEVILLE and CALAIS. It should be easy. The country lends itself generously to this form of attack. This is an all-in warfare. The Allies do not seem to know some of the more ugly holds.

2000 hours. This evening General Georges' directive of this morning ordering an attack through PERONNE and ALBERT to the North is called off. The B.E.F. is left to its fate. This is an astonishing decision.

B.A.F.F. are evacuating their headquarters to-night and are off to ORLEANS. In due course, I understand that we (Advanced Headquarters, North) will also take the road, this time our destination being VERSAILLES.

It begins to look like a hard peace for France and England or a separate peace for France and England left to fight on alone.

Meanwhile the nightingales sing full-throatedly around the chateau and, like the countryside in the loveliness of May, illustrate the great measure of delight that can still be drawn upon in spite of the madness of men who are responsible for this disaster.

*May 25th.* No specially significant development during the last 12 hours. The French liaison officers have just been in to ask me if a tank movement north of ABBEVILLE is German or British. I am convinced that this

and a second column of A.F.Vs. reported moving North from the Somme are portions of Roger Evans' armoured division moving in on the Germans. Have stressed this view and have stopped French bombers from delivering an attack.

Secrecy or "security," as it is called, is sometimes carried too far. Last night reference to the Evans armoured division in a telephonic communication was made in the terms of "Roger's dogs." Why not plain English? How many officers knew General Evans' Christian name? Actually in this case it took 10 minutes to find an officer who could decode the phrase. The enemy have been bombing these same "Roger's dogs" all day and they know their position better than we do. Again and again I say to myself we people on the staff must do our utmost to reduce our share of warfare to the lowest common denominator in terms of simplicity. Too often the reverse seems to be the fashion.

Last night the Bomber Command again bombed the back areas as far East as AACHEN, GELDERN, ROERMOND and WEERT. The bombs are needed closer in to harass the already exhausted German troops who have to be beaten where they stand in the next 48 hours or we lose the Channel ports for good.

1300 hours. Have proved wrong about the A.F.Vs. North of ABBEVILLE. There is a big enemy concentration of M.T. in the FÔRET DE CRECY. These we have now attacked with Fairey Battles. The attack is reported as fully successful. Have asked for this attack to be repeated.

The German *Gros* is making itself evident in the

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PERONNE—ST. QUENTIN—LA FERE triangle. Large numbers of horse-drawn transport and M.T. are in this region. Infantry activity on the Aisne is reported. The infantry are said to be digging and siting M.G. emplacements.

The French seem to resent the slight withdrawal of the B.E.F. to the North yesterday. Since our force was being attacked on three fronts, this resentment seems hardly earned. In any case, the result of the withdrawal has been a delay or possibly an excuse for holding up the French counter-attack which had been expected from the South to be directed on the SOMME East of AMIENS.

The 51st Division B.E.F. is being rushed up to the SOMME from the SAAR. It is due in to-morrow. The new plan appears to be for the French to attempt to recover the bridge-heads over the RIVER SENNE North of CAMBRAI which were lost yesterday. This it is hoped to achieve to-day preparatory to a simultaneous North-and-South counter-attack to-morrow. It is estimated that there are 37 Allied divisions in the Northern area. Lack of unity of command in this area may to some extent offset the potential striking force of this great body of men.

The German *Panzers* are reported on the coast at DUNKIRK this morning. If this is true, the B.E.F. communications are completely severed. Shortage of food and ammunition is reported. Aircraft of all kinds are being employed to bring supplies from England.

The confusion is indescribable. The situation must resolve itself in the course of the next few days. Personally I feel that the psychological moment for the attack has

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been passed. I hope that this apparently unjustified pause will ultimately prove to have been due to the foresight, patience and self-control of great generalship.

Our armoured division appears to be idle on the South bank of the SOMME. If this is so, what is the explanation? If unable to tackle the heavier tank formations in the North, why not turn the armoured division East and by a bold stroke reverse the positions? There are no German armoured divisions to the East. Our armoured division might turn the tables most admirably if only a bold stroke were risked. Our tanks could destroy the columns of German infantry and break up their supply columns with complete ease so long as they were not met by heavier metal. And where is the heavier metal? It is all 80 miles West, but the golden opportunity is to be lost. The French propose to throw our armoured division into an unequal contest against heavier metal in which our light tanks are doomed to be lost, without securing any appreciable advantage in return for their sacrifice.

1730 hours. An air raid is in progress. Seven Germans overhead. Everyone going to ground. This safety first business is going too far. If officers leave their telephones, the Bren gunners will leave their guns. This was the first raid to-day. We think a mosaic was taken of the place yesterday and so a more determined attack on Headquarters may be due to-day.

*May 26th.* Little of note during the night. A sidelight, perhaps of no real value, is recorded in the following conversation. A B.E.F. staff officer was talking to a

French officer from the 3rd Bureau. The English officer asked, "When is the French offensive going to take place?" The Frenchman answered, "Not yet. The armies are *épuisé*." "But surely, too, the Germans are *épuisé*," the Englishman answered. "But they are drunk with success and we are sober with defeat," the Frenchman replied, "and the drunkard has the strength of 7 men."

A message this morning that this H.Q. is down for heavy bombing attack to-day. We got information also of a German H.Q. conference this morning at a chateau nearly 200 miles back. The Air Marshal is determined to knock them out. An attack is to be delivered in order to return the call which is due to us to-day.

1530 hours. Our aerodrome has just been bombed as threatened. Good shooting. 15 bombers with fighter cover came out of the clouds at about 4,000 feet. They dropped about 150 bombs and got several direct hits on hangars, but only 3 machines were written off, though a good many were made temporarily unserviceable. There was a French fighter squadron on the aerodrome, 18 Moranes, but not one of them took off. The pilots were enjoying their *déjeuner*, and so *tant pis*.

The news this afternoon confirmed our worst fears. The Germans have punched through the Belgian defences West of COURTRAI and are now shelling YPRES. On the reverse of this East front, the B.E.F. have been forced back South of ST. OMER to within 4 miles of HAZEBROUCK. The French still hold the line GRAVELINES—ST. OMER, but the B.E.F. at this point have fallen back to the North-east edge of the FÔRET DE CLAIR-

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MARAIS. The Belgians are reported to have no further reserve divisions. The position is clearly desperate. The French seem to have an inkling that the B.E.F. contemplated withdrawal from the moment the 9th Army failed to fight. It is possible that the C.-in-C. may have enquired what arrangements could be made, were evacuation to be the only alternative to surrender. This would have been a normal precautionary procedure. The French seem to have got wind of some such development and to have attached quite undue weight to it. They seem to have believed that they were already abandoned. This sense of doubt of the B.E.F.'s intentions after the failure of the 9th Army to stand may account for the obvious reluctance to embark on a full-scale counter-attack to be delivered from the SOMME northwards.

*May 27th.* Again very little reliable news. The direction of the aerial effort now lies in England. The A.A.S.F. has now only about 55 aircraft at its disposal. In any case, there is now no chance of communicating with G.H.Q. and so pre-arranged co-operation is out of the question.

Archdale, who came here last night from the headquarters of the first group of armies at LILLE, and had travelled from DUNKIRK by a French destroyer to DIEPPE, is very interesting. He says the B.E.F. have not suffered heavily and that the Germans have not attacked them specifically. The Welsh Guards held ARRAS for 4 days against the dive-bombers and did not suffer heavily. They were used to the noise and flurry after that time and took little notice of it.

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General Billotte, who was killed in a motor accident a few days back, has been replaced by General Blanchard. In both cases the set outlook of advancing years has been their handicap. In fact it seems that orthodox training of the French has made them helpless in the face of the unorthodox black magic of the German High Command.

It looks as if a decision has been made to evacuate the B.E.F. Huge losses of material will be entailed. The Germans are bombing the Channel ports continuously. DUNKIRK is perpetually rained on by bombs. If the B.E.F. is really to be off, then the sooner the better. A considerable withdrawal is planned for to-day by the French at the southern extremity of the Allied *bloc* in the North. I suppose this is the beginning of the end of Phase 1. The evacuation may be to CHERBOURG and an attempt may be made to evacuate the whole Allied force of 30-35 divisions and bring them by sea to that port. To me this looks an impossible task. If the expectation of keeping up efficient resistance in France remains slight, then the evacuation will probably be to a British port.

1700 hours. Bad news of the Belgians. The THIELT—ROULERS—ZONNERBEKE line is cracking.

The sad thing is the war's unpopularity—an effect probably due to 20 years of League of Nations windy exaltations. It is one of the main causes of our reverses. We have no shouting and singing of national anthems. The troop-carriers have killed marching songs and it is only German throats that are sore with singing the strains of Horst-Wessel.

What little hope is left is running low.

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*May 28th.* 0830 hours. No news of importance. Phantom, No. 3 Mission, which has done such fine work hitherto in Belgium, has closed down. Our main source of information in the North is gone—I suppose to England. Last night we heard that some 2,800 odds and sods had been shipped over from DUNKIRK.

An officer, who got marooned in LE TOUQUET, waking up there one morning to find the Germans in possession, gave me an interesting account to-day. He has a French wife and has lived in France for a number of years, and so he had no difficulty when dressing up as a fisherman in passing himself off as a Frenchman. For 4 days—the first 4 days of the German occupation—he stayed in the town. It appears that the BOULOGNE—LE TOUQUET—ABBEVILLE area is very lightly held. The Germans are only policing the area; no tanks came into ABBEVILLE at all. Just a handful of motor cyclists; a few of these stood about at the cross-roads and here and there there was an occasional machine-gun and so forth. He told me that in hiding there are at least 5 French soldiers for every German in the area. He says that the Germans are behaving in the most gentlemanly way; they have given passes to all the tradesmen and the latter hurry hither and thither to execute the invaders' orders. This officer collected a handful of British L. of C. men who were also marooned and eventually got them away in a boat. He tells me that French soldiers were wandering about in great numbers in uniform, but, of course, unarmed. They had thrown away their rifles. One of these was heard to say that if only their officers had not run away and they had someone to lead them they would soon mop up the Boche. There were far too many French soldiers to be handled by the

Germans as prisoners and so for some days they were allowed to roam about at will. Eventually they were mopped up and taken away unresisting in motor lorries to a cage somewhere inland.

There is something very phoney about this warfare. It is so unreal. There is so much about it that is really uncanny. The lack of conviction, the irresolution, the sense of resignation, and above all the sense of indifference is wholly disillusioning. This war will not last long—in France.

0930 hours. Great consternation. The news that Leopold has capitulated has come through. No details. Speculations as to terms run high. The pace at which history is being made is certainly accelerated.

1850 hours. It is pitiful to hear the broadcasts when one knows the facts. Brave words again spoken by the politicians. Brave deeds by our men in the North and bad faith elsewhere. Bitterness and cynicism. I hate these conditions of the soul, but who, knowing the facts, can be other than affected by them.

General Vieullemin was here this afternoon. He is the Chief of the French Air Forces in France. He came to confer with the Chief of the British Air Forces in France. He and the Air Marshal sat together on the chateau steps and over tea discussed events. I did not hear their conversation, but looked down on them from an upper window, where I was working.

It is now only a question of how many of the unfortunate and gallant men included in the Allied divisions in the North can be extricated. Churchill says that he will not be able to make an announcement until

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perhaps the end of the week. This means 4 more days.

The evacuation of the L. of C. troops is proceeding from CHERBOURG, I understand. The men from ROUEN are being reduced in numbers steadily.

Our concern here is now mainly to safeguard the A.A.S.F. The whole of B.A.F.F. will have left here by to-morrow morning. Advanced Headquarters North will be left to its own devices with the A.O.C.-in-C. I do not think that we shall be here long. I do not give the French more than 21 days of warfare. They are not in it heart and soul. Not the people.

*May 29th.* 0630 hours. Last night Colonel Woodall gave me an account of his visit that evening to the Swayne Mission and the Chief of General Georges' 3rd Bureau. It appears that the 7th French Army has been so knocked about that it can no longer be looked upon as a fighting force. The 9th Army is no longer a fighting force. The 1st French Army has ceased to exist. "*Ca n'existe plus,*" they say. The French now have 51 divisions left, apart from the 10 fortress divisions in the Maginot. The Maginot is to be denuded of all except fortress divisions and a small reserve. 10 divisions are now between ABBEVILLE and PARIS, and they form what we describe as a mass of manœuvre. The balance of some 35 divisions is left to defend the 180-mile front from MONTMEDY to the sea. Clearly, unless the Germans make a strategical error and attack on the ABBEVILLE—PARIS line, where the reserve divisions can be used to advantage, or, alternatively, they attempt an immediate invasion of England, it will only be a matter of

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days for them to pierce any point on the rest of the line and push through to administer a *coup de grâce*.

The B.E.F. is reported to be carrying out a successful evacuation under cover of smoke. 1 troopship sunk. What does "successful" imply, I wonder? It is impossible to realise the extent of the tragedy this week witnesses.

*May 30th.* 1000 hours. The news of the evacuation from DUNKIRK is far better than expected. 52,000 away, and if the weather continues to be favourable—that is to say, if the low clouds and rain persist—it is expected that another 32,000 will get away by to-night.

Yesterday Woodall and Oxborrow set off in our car to confirm the reconnaissance reports of our two last sorties, in the SOISSONS—RETHEL—RHEIMS area. The pilots of both these sorties reported bridges unblown, the general state of unpreparedness on the Aisne, very few troops, no guns and no tanks. There was no trench system, no trace of digging at all, no anti-tank traps, no barricades worthy of the name. All this was quite contrary to the information we had received from General Georges. According to the General, the line of the AISNE was strongly held. Woodall and Oxborrow confirmed the pilots' reports. On the roads they met only a few groups of sentries cowering behind inadequate protection. Not a machine-gun nest anywhere, not a gun trained, not a zone of fire marked out. They visited a battalion headquarters not far from the AISNE. They discussed the position with the Commander, who was an unshaven, dirty little man, very little like a soldier. When asked why there was no trench

system, he said that the troops he commanded were Algerians and that Algerians never dig. This was bad luck for the Algerians, but even more unfortunate for those they were supposed to protect. There was no *ligne de recueil*, no attempt at any form of organised resistance. On either flank the same conditions prevailed. There was not an anti-tank obstacle that would have delayed a German tank one second.

On the other side of the river the Germans are holding positions very lightly. But it is clear that if they wish they can come over the Aisne at SOISSONS and RETHEL without any preparation—in fact, they can walk through, observing only the ordinary route-march routine. Woodall and Oxborrow have gone over to the headquarters of the 6th Army with a French liaison officer this morning to give their impressions in person.

Woodall and Oxborrow now back. Their visit to the 6th Army went off quite smoothly. Alas! These headquarters confirm 100 per cent. all that had been laid bare by yesterday's motor reconnaissance. It is true, they said, Algerians do not dig. Algerians never dig. The front was a wide one, it was explained. Yes, 27 kilometres per division. Yes, the Germans could pierce the line anywhere at will. The 6th Army was *épuisé*; it had lost 50 per cent. of its equipment. *Que voulez-vous*, they had shrugged their shoulders, *c'est la guerre*, and there the matter ended. Woodall and Oxborrow came back through RHEIMS. They described it as a dead city. It was untouched by bomb or shell, but dead; not a living soul in the city. Evidence of panic desertion on every side; the taxicabs still stood on the ranks, there was still food and wine in the restaurants, and the shop windows were still dressed ready to attract the public.

I must admit I felt rather prompted by a low desire to run down to RHEIMS for a little bit of loot.

The country on either side the AISNE is dead also; the villages and the fields are unpopulated. When some soldiers by the roadside were asked how it was that the farms were deserted as well as the towns, they pointed upwards and shrugged their shoulders. It is quite clear that bombing spreads fear more successfully than 10,000 guns.

*May 31st.* 1115 hours. We hear this morning that the large numbers of troops already evacuated from DUNKIRK do not include any of the fighting men. They are all L. of C. people and various odds and sods who have got driven in from the West. No member of the 10 divisions has been embarked so far. The battle for DUNKIRK rivals in intensity the Battle of the Marne in 1914, but how different the circumstances. General Prioux, it is said, has broken through the German forces which were cutting him off from the B.E.F. and joined the troops defending the embarkation at DUNKIRK.

General Dill is due in this region to-day. Great decisions are about to be taken. Does the position in France warrant the risking of another B.E.F.? That is what has to be decided. Personally, I say, No. Our mission is to beat the Germans. England is the only effective force left capable of achieving this end. Should she dissipate her hardly sufficient strength in shoring up a defeated France, then the two countries will sink together. Let England survive to fight effectively even if alone, and some day she will free France when England achieves ultimate victory.

The English possess the qualities of their defects. They will win and it will be because they never know when they are beaten. This is one of the truest of tags. The outlook of the average soldier and airman is amazing. They refuse to see anything they find unsightly. Up to the very last minute they will come up to you and ask you if it is a joke about the evacuation. They say, "Oh, of course it isn't true," and when it is confirmed that the enemy has advanced another 30 miles they look rather pained and assure you that it is only a rumour. They collectively ignore unwelcome facts that stare them in the face. It is a wonderful gift, born perhaps of some latent simplicity, but a characteristic that stands England in good stead.

For the last 6 months I have said myself that England will win, but I am afraid my reasons have been rather English. Even to-day I still think England will win, but only because it is my religion that England cannot be defeated. Even the events of the last 10 days have not shaken that faith.

Woodall and Oxborrow off again on another reconnaissance. They are undertaking on a small scale the sort of work so well done by No. 3 Mission. It is reported here this morning that this Mission was lost on the troopship sunk off DUNKIRK two days ago. A great loss. There was no better run show.

The D.M.I. (Gen. Mason McFarlane) was here yesterday at No. 2 Mission, but I did not see him personally.

1430 hours. Just walked back from lunch with the man from LE TOUQUET. He retold me the story of his experiences when caught in LE TOUQUET. He impressed

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on me again the fact that the thousands of French troops who laid down their arms when the German motor cyclists and motor combinations—that is, with side-cars mounting machine guns—came in could easily have turned the Germans out. He said there was not a single tank that stayed behind.

*June 1st.* 1000 hours. General Dill is arriving here to-day at No. 2 Mission. He was expected yesterday. A summary of the information obtained by Woodall and Oxborrow has been forwarded to the War Office by telephone. I have seen a copy of this signal which should be effective in bringing home the truth. Various officers from home who have turned up here during the last 3 days had not been accurately informed previously on the position on the SOMME and AISNE fronts.

No news of special significance. The only reports to get through now come by wireless or through the *Continental Daily Mail* and the French Press generally.

Some of the younger officers still fail to appreciate the difference between war and peace. To-day I received an amazing document from an officer in this chateau. He received information 4 days old from the United Kingdom regarding a certain routine detail return sent out here. He writes from downstairs saying that he understands that we receive these details in advance by telephone from England. There has been no routine telephone communication here during the last week, as all lines but one have been cut. He then asks, do we want to receive a written confirmation in future in full or just a summary of the *permanent* or *semi-permanent* items contained.

I made this marginal note: "Your anachronism (reference and date) duly noted and placed on our historical file."

It is an extraordinary thing, but at home or overseas it seems impossible to persuade some people to take the trouble to walk in next door or wander up the few stairs, after which efforts, in a few seconds given up to the exchange of ideas, they can find out far more than they would ever discover through the process of sending elaborate minutes through a central registry—with the added advantage that they get their information immediately. Records might suffer—mostly unwanted records—but we should win the war quicker that way.

1700 hours. News came through at midday that the Command of the B.E.F. passed from G.H.Q. to 1st Corps at 1800 hours on May 31st. This corps provides the rear-guard and will embark after the French. It is commanded by General Alexander. We wish them luck.

So far 150,000 fit men, 10,000 casualties, and 15,000 Allied soldiers have been evacuated. A total of 175,000 successfully embarked.

*June 2nd.* 1215 hours. Nothing startling. Night duty last night.

A number of rather fruitless inquiries from various sources kept me active and irritated most of the night.

Woodall just returned from the Swayne Mission. General Swayne spoke to me this morning on the

*Panzer* question. Woodall saw General Georges, who said that a new spirit had become evident among the French troops. General Georges said that the troops realised at last that they were faced with inglorious defeat and the loss of their country. The spirit of VERDUN was aroused. But the circumstances, he added, were less favourable than in 1918.

*June 3rd.* 0915 hours. Attention now turns to the policy to be adopted in regard to the Air Force in France. At the moment the A.A.S.F. is down to some 70 bombers and 30 fighters. The various staffs include nearly 400 officers, the strength in other ranks including M.T. signals and aircraftmen runs to some 12,000 men. The M.T. includes 2,000 lorries. For the moment, in aircraft, it has become a token force only. It is unfair to criticise at the moment when events have moved intolerably fast, but to many of us—in fact, all of us—now that we seem to be robbed of the possibility of usefulness out here the waste in time and material is very troubling.

1615 hours. At about 1330 hours, during luncheon, came a tremendous thunder of heavy bombers. Three waves of about 50 machines each passed over us at about 20,000 feet. I could only just see them. They gave the impression that is gained when looking through clear water at small fry deep down but caught by the sunlight as they twist and turn. Not a single French fighter left our aerodrome until the last wave was safely over. Then one or two of the 18 Moranes sailed into the air and from a height of 3,000 or 4,000

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feet fired a few bursts into space. I saw this and I remembered General Georges and his statement of this morning. Where was the spirit of VERDUN?

I hear that the Germans opened up the war with 9,000 front-line aircraft. Their output is 1,500 per month. Our fighter losses have been severe during the first 3 weeks. The bomber losses almost nil. Our bomber total is steadily growing.

*June 4th.* The 150 G.A.F. that came over here yesterday dropped about 1,000 bombs in the environs of PARIS, some even in the BOIS DE BOULOGNE, when they were trying to hit the Citroën Works there and a branch of the French Air Ministry. We understand that there were only 200 casualties and that the material damage was not of great importance.

We are now awaiting Mussolini's pronouncement. We are also expecting a large-scale German attack southwards in the course of the next 2 or 3 days.

*June 5th.* 0915 hours. No news of Italy. Indication of enemy preparations for attack across the SOMME on PARIS and across the AISNE probably in the direction of CHALONS to turn the MAGINOT. See no reason to modify my previous views as to the duration of the campaign.

Yesterday the Army "cell," as we describe ourselves, justified its existence politically. Woodall was able to draw attention to the attitude of the Army towards the R.A.F. The Army has been making very adverse criticism. It accuses the R.A.F. of abandoning the

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B.E.F. during the retreat. We even hear that the soldiers spit on the ground when they see the Air Force uniform. This is due to a monstrous misunderstanding of the facts by the rank and file. We have made a statement of the facts and have stressed the urgency for dissipating this misapprehension. We have still got a telephone line to LONDON through PARIS and a message Woodall telephoned to LONDON was in time to inform the Premier's statement on this subject and the general situation in the House of Commons on June 4th. Excellent. We had the satisfaction of hearing Churchill, when listening to the broadcast of his speech, explaining the magnificent courage and self-sacrifice of the R.A.F. in their effort to safeguard the men in khaki during the evacuation at DUNKIRK. I think this very effectively disposed of the unfounded criticisms and false impressions of the soldiers regarding the efforts made by the Air Force in daylight on their behalf during the retreat.

1345 hours. At 1115 hours came the news that the expected enemy attack had begun at 0400 hours this morning on the SOMME—AMIENS—PERONNE fronts. By noon the *Panzers* were through at several points. A simultaneous attack was launched West of LAON towards CHAUNY along the valley of the OISE.

It is now impossible to keep pace on paper with the German advance. I was writing a paraphrase translation of the last two Z.O.A.N. *directives* this morning at 1000 hours. By noon, when they were in the hands of the C.-in-C., they were 75 per cent. out of date. My expectation is a fairly rapid move for us. Perhaps tonight. We run again.

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*June 6th.* 1130 hours. Night duty last night, but fairly restful and nothing so far to record to-day.

1830 hours. A Z.O.A.N. message brings bad news. The Germans have crossed the BRAISLE just East of EU, 4 miles East of LE TREPORT. This means that the 51st Division has fallen back about 5 miles since this morning. We learn that this division has suffered very heavily.

East of AMIENS, just North of ROYE, there is a concentration of A.F.Vs. estimated to number 800 to 1,000. A big push is likely here in the direction of COMPIÈGNE.

HONNOY, 16 miles East-south-east from AMIENS is surrounded by 40 tanks and the whole French line now very doubtful. The French have apparently failed to dig. In 1914-18, with the same opportunities, there would have been a fine defensive position of field fortifications in depth—that is, a big trench system offering the opportunity of a prolonged defence. *Autre fois autre mœurs.*

*June 7th.* 1015 hours. The battle for PARIS is in full swing. No definite news this morning. The whole front is fluid and anything may happen.

1600 hours. MONTDIDIER and COMPIÈGNE have gone to the Germans.

1800 hours. Enemy in FORMERIES and GRANDVILLIERS. Rumour of advanced elements as far ahead as BEAUVAIS and PONTOISE, about 20 miles West-south-west from PARIS.

There has been a good deal of anxiety about the fate

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of the fighters if we are driven much further South. The radius of action of the fighters is very limited and the Air Marshal is afraid they may never get home if the moment for final evacuation comes as appears inevitable. I have suggested the use of the Channel Island air-ports, more particularly JERSEY, as refuelling points.

2310 hours. The enemy advance continues. NEUF-CHATEL is added to the toll. Air Commodore Cole-Hamilton has been instructed to quit his headquarters at ROUEN and go back to MOEUX.

*June 8th.* Night duty. A busy night. Much news all tending in the same direction. It would seem that we, too, will have to move our headquarters to-day. Had difficulty in getting first light sortie information. A lovely morning, but a thin veil of mist at about 300 feet, which will be enough to kill all chance of effective reconnaissance work.

*June 9th.* 0945 hours. Yesterday afternoon events moved fast. A break-through on a 10-mile front, about 5 miles either side of SOISSONS, was reported by G.Q.G. Two columns of tanks are reported in SOISSONS—CHATEAU-THIERRY and SOISSONS—VILLERS-COTTERET areas. Woodall and Oxborrow had already set off on a ground reconnaissance in the SOISSONS direction when this news reached me. Was called to the Ops. room to discuss the situation with the C.-in-C. I stated my view from the military angle and agreed that it would be wise to transfer these headquarters to ORLEANS at once,

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as had been planned for some time in the event of a successful German thrust across the AISNE. We moved last night and got through to our new headquarters about 0430 hours this morning. We briefed a pilot before leaving to reconnoitre the SOISSONS area at first light and arranged for evacuation of all our aircraft at the same hour. This sortie pilot is now just in and reports no further progress South of SOISSONS. The Germans have penetrated about 8 miles South of the AISNE.

But grave news comes in from G.Q.G. The Germans have begun a big push North of RHEIMS and have crossed the AISNE in this direction in great strength, led by *Panzers*. The maximum British and French air effort is to be made in this area to check the A.F.Vs. This attack looks like the genuine thing. It may be the beginning of a great pincer movement destined to drive down to CHALONS-SUR-MARNE and thence to ORLEANS to meet the complementary pincer closing in from the West after crossing the SEINE at ROUEN. This appears to be the German plan. They mean to occupy France as far South as the LOIRE and make a peace then with the French people and not the French Government.

Yesterday Woodall and Oxborrow had a narrow squeak. A village they had passed through a few seconds before was heavily bombed by 24 ME. 110's. The casualties were very high, the streets being crowded with soldiers at the time. Dead horses and men blocked the roads, which ran deep in blood.

*June 10th.* Many scrappy happenings here derived from the battle; all forms of communications

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generally disorganised. Many rumours of heavy German attacks on the AISNE South of RETHEL and on the SEINE. Woodall flew in a D.H. 89 to DREUX to interview Air Commodore Cole-Hamilton. This was an unpleasant task in an unarmed aircraft of ancient pattern.

Scarcity of petrol—that is, of octane 101—which is necessary for our Blenheims, and lack of preparation for reception of personnel after the move made last night, made things very difficult for all of us. I have been on duty continuously for 48 hours; food has been very scarce; we only get it about once in 12 hours.

The country and ORLEANS itself very lovely. How cruel to think that here, too, as at ROUEN, this venerable town may soon be partially destroyed. The bridges are well mined. They consist of a great many arches and most of the arches have been prepared for destruction. This is unusual. The French demolitions have been bad as a rule. They have frequently blown only the first arches and have left gaps very easily and quickly bridged. The LOIRE is several hundreds of yards wide here and is, I suppose, the final obstacle if the French line cracks again and they continue to fight it out. It is said that the French are showing the old spirit at last. Some of them have, of course, all along, but I do not think it can ever be general. In any case, its revival now looks like being too late.

1550 hours. A quartermaster of a tank battalion forming a part of our armoured division turned up here to-day with two cars and twenty men. They represent a few of the survivors of the gallant but abortive action of this division when counter-attacking with the French.

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The French infantry arrived on the scene 5 hours late. The tanks had done their work, the ground being cleared, but the French infantry were not there to consolidate the gains. The tanks pottered about trying to hold the ground they had won and were then shot to pieces in detail by the heavier-armoured German tanks. Our armoured division did not attack the strong points, but drove into the line between them. They cruised up and down between these strong points over the shallow trenches and crushed the Germans in them under their tracks. They could not depress their guns enough to deal with the enemy close round them and the crews opened up the tanks and fired their revolvers down the sides of the turrets.

*June 11th.* 0745 hours. The Germans have established small bridge-heads across the Seine at VERNON, ANDELYS and ELBOUF. They are in MOUEX and CHATEAU-THIERRY.

Have been trying to get two sorties off since 0303 hours. Every difficulty. The unforeseen absence of a sergeant observer held up the whole shooting match. There was a recognition signal muddle. The whole thing was muddle.

Italy declared war on France and England last evening. A depressing effect everywhere. The columns of PARIS refugees grow. This time the refugees are townspeople. They have a very different appearance from the unhappy processions we have seen in flight elsewhere. Big cars and little cars in an endless succession. Strained unhappy faces of families of all ages stare out.



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1400 hours. Set off with Woodall to visit General Swayne at No. 2 Mission. This is about 60 miles East up from the LOIRE at the CHATEAU DE PONTCHEVERON near BRIARE. It is the property of what seems to-day to be a rather unappropriately named nobleman. His name is pronounced, and, I think, spelled, Comte D'Accord. It is a magnificent late eighteenth-century mansion. Major-General Howard-Vyse, the head of No. 1 Mission, which was in liaison with General Gamelin, is also housed at PONTCHEVERON. I found Bill Williams there. I had not realised that the Colonel Williams with whom I have spoken a good deal lately was Bill Williams of the old headquarters in ARRAS. General Swayne had bad news of the French 4th and 2nd Armies. These are in full retreat to the MARNE. Tanks had even succeeded in crossing the MARNE at CHARTEUE East of CHATEAU-THIERRY and these were moving East-south-east behind the MARNE. Probably a small column, these last, which may be mopped up in due course, but not before it has done grave damage.

Returning, we joined the refugee route at ORLEANS. I can only describe this extraordinary sight in the terms of the press of traffic on Derby Day in its trek to EPSOM DOWNS. The only difference was in the spirit of this crowd. The pace at which it moved, this column of mixed cars and lorries, would be at about 1 mile per hour. Towards evening many of them pulled out of the queue into side streets and the families pulled the universal mattress which was tied to the roof of every car, as a protection against machine-gun fire, to the ground and threw themselves to sleep in the gutter.

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*June 12th.* 1130 hours. The Germans have three fresh army corps South of RHEIMS. This town was occupied yesterday when the French made a complete withdrawal to the MARNE. There are now 80 German divisions on the CHANNEL-MONTMEDY front. The French possess some very exhausted 35 divisions. There is no longer hope of any success for the French.

P.S. (private sources) keep pouring in messages—most of them very questionable. 45 last night.

1200 hours. The last of these rumours (and the statement is plausible enough) suggest the time is ripe for bombing PARIS.

1210 hours. It was repeated to us again to-day that the lack of enthusiasm in the French armies could be attributed to the fact that one-third of them was drawn from the occupied territory. Even more, it is thought that at least half the soldiers in the French Army have now lost their homes through German occupation.

2300 hours. Very unpleasant news to-night. A big break through over the SEINE with enemy reported as far over as DREUX and EVREUX. Looks like the next move towards the SEINE.

*June 13th.* 1040 hours. Again night duty. A terrific flap. News of a big break through across the SEINE in the PONT DE L'ARCH and ANDELYS regions. *Panzers* reported as far South as EVREUX and DREUX. Sorties

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out at once. Sent out first at 0400 hours. Fairey Battles detailed to bomb suspected woodlands where tanks are believed to be in harbour. Sortie now back with negative information. The Fairey Battle Squadron confirms this.

The French still insist that two important columns of a *Panzer* division are moving South on CHARTRES.

Feeling here is that the French will pack up. Last night a French officer said to me, "We have 35 divisions. Some hold a 30 km. front; 7 km. is the normal maximum. Some are good divisions, but others are bad. What can you? The Germans have 80 divisions with every superiority in equipment. *Que voulez-vous?*"

Unfortunately, all this is only too true.

Spoke to L. of C. and passed on a warning of impending events.

The French Government is now at TOURS with offshoots at BLOIS.

Have volunteered to undertake route reconnaissance for the 2,000 M.T. that we have to move towards the sea to-day.

1410 hours. Only a personal matter. Two of our sortie pilots just off for home with some unserviceable aircraft came in to say good-bye. Both these boys, Collins and Triptree, said they wanted us to apply for them again. Out here or at home at the first opportunity. They said, "We have enjoyed it out here with you." I feel so very strongly for these young men and it is a great pleasure to know that they realised that we have been trying to be their good friends in this war in so far as we could be without conflicting with our duty.

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1500 hours. Communications tell their own story. PARIS "Table A."<sup>1</sup> closed down at midday. A single line was left permanently plugged through to the Air Ministry. The telephone girls have been brought South. They may be returned by air.

2400 hours. The French are reported to be throwing down their arms in the thousands and running South of the MARNE. 60 per cent. of the French shells are turning out dud. This is a confirmed statement.

B.A.F.F. is off to-night for the coast. We are to follow half-way to-morrow or the following day if not too hardly pressed.

Woodall and Oxborrow have been to No. 2 Mission this afternoon and are not back yet.

0045 hours. Have now done another 48 hours on and feel pretty tired.

*June 14th.* The gloomiest forebodings have come true. PARIS was abandoned last night and is to be occupied by the German 14th Army to-day. Rain and heavy cloud is preventing air activity, but intercepted messages show that the enemy intend to carry out deep bombing as soon as the weather allows.

We hear that France has presented the U.S.A. with an ultimatum. Either America declares war on Germany within 24 hours or France makes peace on the best terms she can to-day. I hardly think a democracy can make so rapid and far-reaching a decision.

<sup>1</sup> "Table A" was a section of the telephone exchange reserved for use of the B.E.F.

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It is lack of decision in this system of government by committee that has been our downfall so far.

The Bomber Command report just in from last night. Again the dissipation of effort on too numerous targets seems to me to be an error. It is a part of the duty of a Staff officer to study mass psychology. But how much does a British soldier or airman know of the beginnings of this essential science? I think the answer is, "Not enough."

1215 hours. General Georges has just sent a message that the French Army is to retire to the line of the LOIRE. The MAGINOT is to be abandoned. This sentence is the key to this campaign. Ineptitude has lost us France.

1559 hours. *Message from General Georges: "All organised resistance over."*

0770 hours. Left ORLEANS at 1600 hours with Woodall and Oxborrow for ANGERS via LE MANS. The latter is the headquarters of the L. of C. We had to see General Alan Brooke, who is now C.-in-C. of the B.E.F., and also we were to meet the S.N.O. (Senior Naval Officer) running the embarkation. I think his name is Commander Gaillard, a grave and very competent man. I shall never forget the atmosphere in his office. It was an impressive room in some public building with large rooms opening up on either side. It was a hot evening and the 4 or 5 naval officers there were working in their shirt sleeves. In that room there was the silence of death. No one spoke above a whisper. It was only when giving orders by telephone that you heard a voice raised. The orders that were given were given concisely

and forcibly. There was no doubt about their intention. It was a Cathedral atmosphere and one knew that every man there was a professional and that he was heart and soul wrapped up in the duty he had to undertake. There were a number of soldiers who came to that office, and I could see its effect on them as they stood there, generals and subalterns. I don't think any of us left that office without thanking God for the Navy.

It seems that there are still 75,000 B.E.F. men in France, apart from our 12,000 still to be embarked. As our lot is mobile, it was thought best to let them take the more distant ports, such as BORDEAUX and LA ROCHELLE. We had great difficulty in discovering the Air Marshal's whereabouts in ANGERS when we reached there at 0200 hours. The place was dead. The drive had been a fairly easy one with the blessing of a moon.

Finally we reached our destination, which is the chateau only just vacated by the unhappy Polish Government. The place is still full of Polish troops. I rolled up two rugs in a corner of the enormous hall and slept very peacefully till 0600 hours. There were about 60 men in the hall who apparently talked and drank all night, but I was quite blissfully unaware of this. This morning we find that most of our work yesterday has been fruitless. No one is capable of making a decision. Now it is no longer a question of days but hours if the force we are responsible for is to be saved, partially intact.

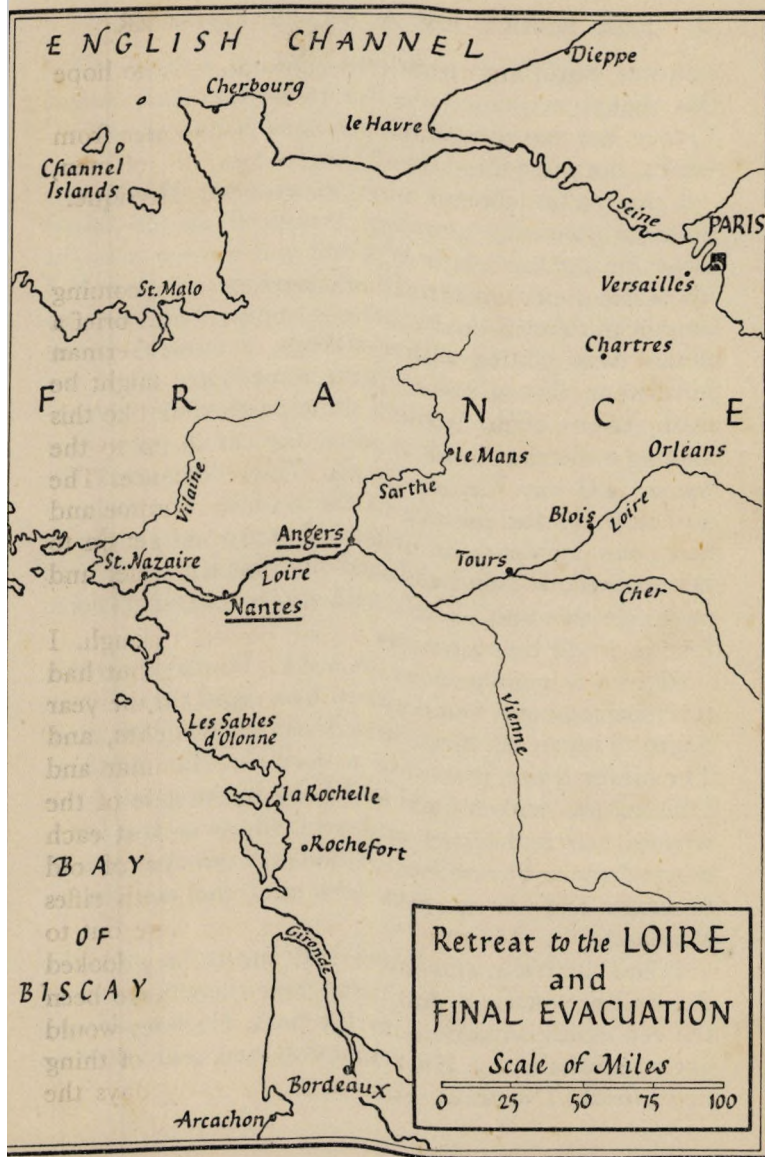
Our present position is the headquarters of the Polish Government in France. It turns out to be an extremely sumptuous chateau, with Aubusson carpets and all, but only for a few hours. The Poles are hauling

it all out, but quite uselessly, because there is no hope of saving it.

Have just had a welcome glass of Polish coffee from the Polish cook-house. They seem a good lot of men, very smart and debonair and of magnificent physique.

*June 16th.* Left ANGERS hurriedly yesterday. On coming back from the aerodrome, where I had been to brief a pilot, I was greeted with the news that the German tanks were only 14 miles up the road. They might be on top of us at any moment. A headquarters like this would be nothing more than a pack of sheep to the *Panzers*. We have no effective means of defence. The Air Marshal asked me to go back to the aerodrome and see to the departure of all aircraft and then get on to NANTES. Woodall and Oxborrow came with me, and we all set off at once.

It was a lovely countryside we passed through. I have known it all very well since childhood, but had never passed down the LOIRE quite so early in the year before. The river, with its wide, sandy beaches, and the vineyards on either side seemed very familiar and home-like to me. We came on the South side of the river and were stopped at every village and at each bridge by very determined looking groups of old civilians. They were really tough, armed with rifles and shot-guns. They put up barriers and were out to stop the lighter enemy motorised stuff. They looked like doing it. A tank would, of course, not have been delayed a second, but motor cycles and lorries would have been held up. If we had seen this sort of thing done in the North of France in the early days the



outcome might have been very different. I wondered if this civilian resistance was due to the fact that central France has never suffered invasion before or, at all events, not since the days of Joan of Arc.

I was rather pleased with an example of my own foresight yesterday morning. I noticed an old *laissez passer* for our car which Woodall had thrown away in his waste-paper basket. It occurred to me that if I altered the date I could make it appear valid and, as things were getting rather ticklish, I thought I was justified in this subterfuge and accordingly faked the card. At one of the barriers some particularly savage-looking ruffians refused to allow the car to pass when we showed our identity cards. They demanded the authority for the passage of the vehicle. The Colonel had none. It was quite evident that we were going to be detained. I then produced my faked card. It was most effective and we left with smiles and salutations. I think I will become a spy.

Arrived at headquarters, B.A.F.F., South of NANTES, this afternoon and found chaos. Last night the columns began to move off, hours late. Everything is jettisoned. The whole place looks like a shambles this morning. Officers' kits broken open and lying in the grass, typewriters, cars and lorries and medical stores and so on everywhere to be had free. About half our men are off to BREST and ST. NAZAIRE now and the rest are in readiness.

Cole-Hamilton, who dined with me at LE MANS the day before yesterday, has taken over the command of the remaining squadrons in the field. He has already got a number away. His remaining men could now be flown back, I expect.

11 We are standing by waiting to push off by road or by air as necessary.

11 Have just pinched a Humber utility van. I have got the driver, too. He and his van were left behind by 24 Squadron, which flew home yesterday. This van will be very useful if we have to leave by road. I have filled it with all our kit which we had expected to abandon and plenty of spare petrol, kettles and other kitchen utensils, whisky and stores that I have collected in the empty camp. We seemed to be prepared for almost any trip now.

20 June 17th. 1015 hours. A first light sortie this morning brought positive information of the enemy. The Germans are in ORLEANS; the bridges are blown and fires are burning. A dozen tanks are at a standstill on the right bank facing a small bridge 12 miles Southwest of ORLEANS. It is odd, but behind the tanks there are several refugees' cars. A German working party is repairing the damage and the German tanks and the French refugees are waiting patiently to cross the bridges together.

20 The envelopment of PARIS is complete and the move to fill in to the LOIRE now remains to be completed.

21 A good example of chaos is the despatch in error of No. 24 Communication Squadron. This squadron left yesterday without passengers. The squadron could have carried back 800 men. They took none. One officer returned home in a large 30-seater aircraft alone.

21 Magnetic mines are being dropped by the Germans here at NANTES and at ST. NAZAIRE and this has hindered

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embarkation a lot. The L. of C. people are still loading supplies as against men; 17 vessels left here yesterday carrying no troops. One ship sunk, but she was empty and on the way in. She has encumbered the fairway.

Heavy weather has helped so far. Visibility very poor and terrific thunderstorms. Sheltered under a Blenheim on the aerodrome last evening and was almost washed away even there with water running under the machine.

Reported now that the vessel sunk is the *Lancastria*, outward bound—heavy loss of life.

We have had 2 good night's rest now and are ready for the last hop. It will have to be long and quick to be a successful one.

Last night a train clanged and banged through at an early hour. One of our A.A. officers heard this and, thinking it to be *Panzers*, jumped out of bed so hastily that he put a toe out of joint. This was this A.A. Brigade's first casualty.

1200 hours. News that the French have asked for an armistice.

1400 hours. A rush for the coast.

1730 hours. The last remnants of the ground personnel are now away. The Air Marshal, who stayed to the last, is leaving by air and has instructed the A.I.L.Os. and military adviser also to return by air forthwith.

1750 hours. Airmen and troops have gone. The Air Marshal has left by air.

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1755 hours. Woodall, Oxborrow and I, five Blenheims with 30 officers and men, left NANTES Aerodrome line astern.

2000 hours. Put down at Heston.

2400 hours. At midnight, I have subsequently learned, German motor cyclists leading the *Panzers* swept through NANTES.

## GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

- A.A. . . . Anti-aircraft.
- A.A.S.F. . . . Advanced Air Striking Force. (This force included all fighter and bomber squadrons located in Northern France at the commencement of operations, excepting only those squadrons forming the Air Component Field Force.)
- A.C.F.F. . . . Air Component Field Force. (This consisted of the Army co-operation units. They were the eyes of the Army. Under R.A.F. command, they worked in close liaison with G.H.Q., mainly through the medium of (Army) air intelligence liaison officers attached to wing and squadron headquarters.)
- A.F.V. . . . Armoured fighting vehicles.
- A.O.C.-in-C. . . . Air Officer Commanding-in-chief.
- A.O.C. . . . Air Officer Commanding.
- A.V.M. . . . Air Vice-Marshal.
- B.A.F.F. . . . British air forces in France. (The R.A.F. supreme command in France. Headquarters originally at Coulommiers.)
- B.E.F. . . . British Expeditionary Force.
- C.G.S.. . . . Chief of General Staff.
- C.-in-C. . . . Commander-in-Chief.
- D.C.I.G.S. . . . Deputy Chief Imperial General Staff.

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- D.L.M. . *Division légère motorise.* (Light motorised division.)
- D.M.I. . Director, Military Intelligence.
- G.I. . General Staff Officer, First Grade.
- G.Q.G. . Grand-Quartier-Générale. (French G.H.Q.)
- G.A.F. . German Air Force.
- G.H.Q. . General Headquarters.
- G.O.C. . General Officer Commanding.
- H.Q. . Headquarters.
- J.1. . *Jour one.* (The first day of any special operation, viz. the German invasion, J.1, J.2, J.3, etc.)
- L. of C. . Line of communications.
- M.G. . Machine gun.
- M.T. . Mechanical transport.
- R.A.F. . Royal Air Force.
- R.A.S.C. . Royal Army Service Corps.
- T.S.F. . Telegraph *sans fil* (wireless).
- Z.O.A.N. . *Zone des Opérations Aériennes du Nord.* (Roughly indicated, this zone included the operational areas North-east and South-west of a line drawn South-east from Ostende to Metz.)

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